Ladder Safety

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Recently a friend of mine fell from his roof while he was performing routine Spring maintenance, thankfully he was not seriously injured; but the potential for serious injury was present. I began to think about all the accident summaries I have read regarding falls from roofs and ladders, so I decided to research the topic further.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that more than 90,000 people receive emergency room treatment for ladder accidents each year. Although I have found other sources that state ladders cause an estimated 300 deaths and 130,000 injuries requiring emergency medical attention every year. In any case, one death or one injury is too many. In addition, the United States Bureau of labor Statistics reported that the median days lost associated with a non-fatal fall from elevation was approximately 15 days. Some of the most common hazards involving ladders are instability, electrical shocks, and falling. With a bit of thought and some knowledge, these accidents can be predicted and prevented.

Choose the Right Ladder

It is important that you always use a ladder that is appropriate in size and construction for the task at hand. For example, if you are going to be handling anything with an electric current, you should never use a metal ladder. You also need to be sure that your ladder can tolerate your weight. Pay attention to the different classes and choose the ladder that suits your needs.

Type I Industrial -- this ladder is heavy-duty and can support up to 250 pounds.

Type II Commercial -- this is a medium-duty ladder that will support up to 225 pounds.

Type III Household -- this ladder is for light household task and can support up to 200 pounds.

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Ladder safety is mostly common sense, but people still make foolish mistakes and pay the price. Refresh your memory with these ladder safety tips:

- Most ladders are meant to support one person.
- Do not try to reach so far that you lose your balance; instead, simply move the ladder.
- Place the ladder on a non-skid surface or add rubber treads to the bottom of the ladder to prevent slipping.
- Never stand on the ladder's top three rungs, or the paint bucket shelf of a stepladder.
- Never use a broken ladder.
- Use proper ladder angles, don't place an extension ladder's angle too steep or spanned too far away from the work area. Follow the ladder's recommended angle guides for ladder safety. Use the 1:4 ratio to ensure a stable working platform. Place the base of the ladder 1 foot away of whatever it leans against for every 4 feet of height to the point where the ladder contacts at the top.
- When using extension ladders, make sure that all locks are firmly secured.
- When dealing with electrical equipment, never use a metal ladder; always choose a nonconductive ladder made of wood or fiberglass.

- Never use a wet ladder, as you may slip while climbing; always wear proper footwear with non-slip soles.
- Always face the ladder when climbing or descending.
- Keep both feet on the ladder - never put one foot on a rung and the other foot on a different surface. Always keep at least 3 points of contact on the ladder when working, your feet and 1 hand.
- Never leave a raised ladder unattended.
- Do not place a ladder in front of a door that is not locked, blocked or guarded.
- Always follow the instruction labels on ladders.

Ladder Maintenance

Most likely you don't use your ladder every day, or even every month. For this reason, it is important that you inspect the ladder for flaws before you climb up. Be sure to check that all rungs are secure. Look for loose nails, screws, hinges or bolts. If you are using a wooden ladder, be sure that no part is warped or splintered. Lastly, check to be sure that the ladder's feet are even and that the ladder does not wobble.

Follow these safety tips and you will minimize the risk associated with the task at hand.